



MEMOIR OF GAMALIEL BRADFORD, M. D.

BY CONVERS FRANCIS, D. D.

THE name of Bradford stands in an honored place on the records of New England history. From WILLIAM BRADFORD, the ancient governor of the Plymouth colony, — a man in the front rank of the Puritan worthies, — Dr. Gamaliel Bradford, of whom a brief notice is here to be given, was a lineal descendant, in the sixth generation. He was the son of Gamaliel Bradford, Esq., a gentleman who, by intellectual culture, manly courage, and the best qualities of a generous heart, won a high place in the respect of the wise and good.*

Dr. Bradford was born in Boston, November 17th, 1795. At the early age of twelve years, he had passed through the preparation usual at that time for admission to Harvard University. But, as he was deemed too young to meet the duties and hazards of a college life, he accompanied his father on a voyage to the southern part of Europe, and was placed in a Catholic seminary at Messina, where he remained nine months. The winter of 1808-9 he spent in London, and in the ensuing spring returned to Boston. His studies were continued at home, and in 1810 he entered Harvard University. Without the impulse of a strong ambition for the literary honors of college, his unquestioned talents, classical attainments, and keen intellectual activity gave him a highly respect-

* See a Memoir of him in the *Massachusetts Historical Collections*, 3d series, Vol. I., p. 202.

403107

LSC0

able position among the good scholars of his class. At the Commencement in 1814, when he was graduated, he delivered an English poem, which, as well as his poetry on other occasions, afforded gratifying evidence that he had not courted the Muses in vain.

Leaving college with the preparation of a ripened and richly furnished mind, Dr. Bradford selected for his calling the medical profession. While pursuing the studies of that department, he was occasionally engaged in the business of private instruction, and for one year held the office of assistant teacher in the Boston Latin School. In the winter of 1818, after a diligent attendance as a medical student at the almshouse, he was seized with the typhus fever, which prevailed at that place, and for several weeks his life was in great danger. He always thought that his constitution never wholly recovered from the shock of that illness.

In the autumn of 1819, he went abroad in pursuit of the objects of his professional education, and attended the medical lectures at the University of Edinburgh. He returned in the spring of 1820, and commenced practice as a physician in Boston. In March, 1821, he was married to Sophia Rice, daughter of Colonel Nathan Rice, who had faithfully served his country as a major in the Revolutionary army, and was held in high esteem wherever he was known. Dr. Bradford found in the virtues and the devoted affection of his wife a blessing beyond all price, especially under the trials which afterwards fell to his lot. A few months before his marriage, he had removed to Cambridge, where a more rapid progress seemed to be promised in his professional business than could be expected by a young physician in the city. During the winter of 1824-5, he delivered an excellent course of lectures on physiology in Boston, in connection with Dr. John Ware. In the autumn of 1826, he left Cambridge and returned to Boston. The following year, he gave up the medical profession, in the science of which few were so thoroughly versed, however its details of practice might be ill suited to his taste or temperament. He then undertook the management of a large brewery in South Boston, to the superintendence of which he de-

voted himself with great industry and fidelity. While Dr. Spurzheim was in Boston, Dr. Bradford, who was always a decided and strenuous adversary to the doctrines of phrenology, delivered three lectures on the subject, distinguished for scientific clearness and ability. The business of the brewery he continued till 1833; and, within a few months after he left it, he received the appointment of Superintendent of the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. The important and sometimes perplexing duties of that station he discharged in a spirit of vigilance, faithfulness, and strict firmness, alike honorable to himself and happy for the institution.

For some time Dr. Bradford had been suffering under a malady which filled the hearts of his friends with sad apprehensions. It was in 1832 that his health was first assailed by fits of epilepsy. These increased in frequency and severity from year to year. Hoping to find some wholesome and relieving influence from a voyage, he went up the Mediterranean in October, 1838, and was absent four months. But his failing health was not restored or assisted; and on the 22d of October, 1839, an epileptic attack of unusual severity terminated his life, at the age of forty-four years.

Every one acquainted with the intellectual character of Dr. Bradford will remember that he knew how to make the best use of the stores of an amply furnished mind. Few men could better sift the learning connected with any subject, so as to detach the available matter from a mixed mass. The steady clearness of intellectual vision for which he was remarkable enabled him to bring and keep before his view both the near and the remote bearings of a question. In conversing with him, one was often surprised to find in how few words he would lay open lines of thought before unnoticed, but now seen to be avenues to important truth. For all that ever wore the semblance of quackery or pretence he had a strong dislike, which expressed itself with severe honesty. A sham, however disguised under solemn forms or veiled with stately words, found little mercy at his hands. He appreciated well the meaning of the saying, that "Reasons and reason are different things." It was his habit to sub-

ject facts to a rigorous scrutiny, and to value them chiefly in reference to the general laws of which they are the expression. In the same spirit, he measured men and their doings by the standard of essential principles. There is a class of inquirers, who are seldom satisfied till they have removed the coverings gathered over opinions and actions by policy or custom, and looked at the central truth or falsehood which lies within. Dr. Bradford belonged to this class. He sought always to reach what he believed to be the last analysis of a question, and to arrive at the broad principle which includes all particular cases. What may have seemed to some like extravagance in his views of political and social subjects was, in truth, the result of a philosophical spirit, that aimed to penetrate beyond conventional accidents to the foundation of man's relations and rights. Hence he had the wisdom of hope, which believes wrong to be remediable, simply because it is wrong. "The greatest evils and the most lasting," it has been said, in words which might well express his doctrine of reform, "are the perverse fabrications of unwise policy; but neither their magnitude nor their duration are proofs of their immobility. They are proofs only that ignorance and indifference have slept profoundly in the chambers of tyranny, and that many interests have grown up, and seeded and twisted their roots in the crevices of many wrongs."*

The character of Dr. Bradford's mind was strictly analytical. But he never undervalued those truths which find their justification in sentiment, provided the sentiment were not another name for transient or perverted feeling. On the contrary, he regarded these as expressions of the soul's essential laws, and found their sufficient defence in the fact, that they are imbedded in the constitution of human nature. Though he loved to look at things in the dry light of the understanding, yet he never forgot that the understanding alone cannot solve the great problem of man and his aspirations. His instinctive sense of right was quick, while his demand for evidence was searching and not easily satisfied. It is worthy of remark,

* Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, Vol. III., p. 71.

that the perverting influences which have sometimes been ascribed to medical studies, in questions of intellectual philosophy, never misled his mind. His faith in the intense reality of the spiritual nature was strong; and he never gave his sanction to the shallow speculations which would find an account of man's whole being in the action of material laws.

In medical science the learning of Dr. Bradford was unquestionably ample, and his judgment sound and enlightened. But his interest as a student reached far beyond the limits of his professional inquiries. This was especially the case in the latter part of his life, when the great questions of intellectual and ethical philosophy were among his most frequent subjects of thought and conversation. He took much delight in the best books on these topics. Sir James Mackintosh was his peculiarly favorite author; and it was not long before his death that he spoke with intense pleasure of the memoirs of that admirable writer, which he had then just read. From these severer studies he found a healthful recreation of mind in the best romances and works of fiction, which afforded him great pleasure, and of which he judged with fine critical taste.

As a writer, Dr. Bradford was much and very favorably known, chiefly, however, in short and occasional efforts. These productions of his pen are numerous, and are mostly to be found in various journals of the day.* They bear honorable testimony to his power of clear, vigorous thought, his love of truth, and his fearless honesty of mind. He wrote with ease, and was fond of this exercise of talent. Had the powers of his mind been earnestly concentrated upon some large and important work, he would have

* They consist principally of essays and reviews published in the *Boston Spectator*, *The Nondescript*, *New England Journal*, *United States Literary Gazette*, *New England Magazine*, *North American Review*, and *Christian Examiner*. Dr. Bradford's address to the Massachusetts Temperance Society, and his letter to Fletcher, Sprague, and Otis, on Slavery, were published in a pamphlet form. His speech when the Abolitionists had a hearing before a committee of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, in the spring of 1831, was published as a pamphlet, and also in *The Liberator*. These various writings amount to about eighty different pieces. While they all bear the stamp of no ordinary mind, some of them are enlivened with that well directed humor which formed a part of the composition of Dr. Bradford's genius. It should be added, that he twice officiated as poet at the anniversaries of the Phi Beta Kappa Society in Cambridge, namely, in 1820 and in 1827. These poems were not published.

left a memorial of his genius among the writings not soon to be forgotten.

It may be said of Dr. Bradford, not only that his moral standard was high, but that it rose higher the more he became involved in the duties and the business of life. He never paltered with conscience or principle. No shuffling devices ever degraded his opinions or conduct. Dr. Bradford was eminently a man of integrity. Every one who knew him relied spontaneously on the forthright and thorough honesty of the man. In all transactions with others, and in the discharge of any trust, his faithfulness was minutely scrupulous. He would never avail himself of excuses even for those slight deviations from accuracy which are by common consent considered venial. But his integrity, exact as it was in these respects, reached much further. It directed and shaped his convictions, his opinions, and the use he made of his influence. It was a principle which rendered him faithful in all outward relations, because he was first faithful to his own soul. There was no hollowness at the surface, because the centre was sound. His thoughts and deeds were true to the law of right; his purposes and acts sprung from a moving power in his own moral nature, not from gusty influences abroad. Thus he was a whole man, not a compound of pieces and fragments, which have no harmony, and hold together only so long as they are surrounded by an outward pressure from the world's law or fashion. His integrity was not the varnish of conventional honesty in the affairs of the world, but the spontaneous form of thought and action taken by one who desires *to be* rather than *to seem*. It proved itself no less in fidelity to his convictions of right, than in fidelity to his engagements. His truthfulness might sometimes seem stern or abrupt; but its meaning was honest and even kind. No one could know him without perceiving that his indignation at wrong expressed a sentiment inspired alike by benevolence and by a sound logic, and that he was quite fearless in manifesting the feeling. From this source sprung his enlightened and firm attachment to the cause of Anti-slavery, a cause which he believed to rest on the high ground of unalterable right, as well as of pure humanity. His spirited

and forcible speech in March, 1831, when the Abolitionists had a hearing before a committee of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, left a deep impression at the time, and will be long remembered by those who were present on that occasion.

Dr. Bradford cherished a true and living interest in the Christian religion, both speculative and practical. The great questions it suggests to every thoughtful mind arrested his earnest attention, as questions reaching to the foundation of our being; and the importance of its sanctions to the true conduct of life was apprehended by him in all its extent. The progress of years quickened his feelings and strengthened his convictions on this subject. In the latter part of his life, the highest truths became matters of a more searching and personal interest to him than ever. They made themselves felt in all his principles; and he would have deemed it a shallow folly to think of constructing a system of philosophy or ethics, without the religious sentiment at its centre.

On the whole, we may say that here was a true, enlightened, upright man, — one who thought soundly and clearly, and kept the eye of his mind ever fixed on great principles, — a man of realities, not of devices. Those who knew him will always feel, that, in the remembrance of his fine talents and his unbending probity, they have that record of wisdom and virtue which gives forth an imperishable blessing. We are reminded of the very significant words of an ancient English drama: —

“ I have ever thought
Nature doth nothing so great for great men,
As when she's pleased to make them lords of truth :
Integrity of life is fame's best friend,
Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.” *

* Webster's *Duchess of Melfi*.



